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# LOCKE ON PRIMARY AND SECONDARY QUALITIES

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Text source:

*Essay Concerning Human  
Understanding*, bk. 2 ch. 8 & ch. 21  
sections 1-3

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# QUALITIES vs IDEAS OF QUALITIES

- Our encounters with material bodies (i.e. physical objects) leads to their producing various ideas in us.
    - E.g. Our experience of a particular Granny Smith apple produces *ideas* of a certain roundish shape, a certain size, a certain range of green shades, a certain tart taste, and certain crisp texture etc...
  - Here Locke distinguishes the **qualities** (=properties) had by the material object from the **ideas of those qualities** in our mind.
    - **Qualities** are in the external objects.
    - **Ideas of qualities** are in the mind.
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## LOCKE DISTINGUISHING QUALITIES & IDEAS OF QUALITIES

- “Our ideas and the qualities of bodies.  
*Whatsoever the mind perceives in itself, or is the immediate object of perception, thought, or understanding, that I call **idea**; and the power to produce any idea in our mind, I call **quality** of the subject wherein the power is. Thus a snowball having the power to produce in us the ideas of white, cold, and round, the powers to produce those ideas in us as they are in the snowball, I call qualities; and as they are sensations or perceptions in our understandings, I call them ideas”* (Locke, Essay bk. 2. ch. 8. sec. 8)
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# PRIMARY AND SECONDARY QUALITIES

- Locke holds that there is a deep metaphysical difference between two types of quality:
    - **PRIMARY QUALITIES**: size, shape, motion, solidity
    - **SECONDARY QUALITIES**: color, taste, odor, sound, felt texture, etc
  - Traditionally (in both pre-scientific common sense, and in the received Aristotelian philosophy), these two types of quality were both thought to exist in external bodies in much the same way. In particular...
    - The color of the apple exists in the apple in much the same way as its shape and size. PQs and SQs are all straightforwardly intrinsic, non-relational qualities.
    - Further, just as our **idea** of the apple's roundness *resembles* the **quality** roundness in the apple, so too our **idea** of the apple's color *resembles* the **quality** greenness in the apple. Ideas of PQs resemble PQs, and ideas of SQs resemble SQs.
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# LOCKE'S RIVAL VIEW:

- **PRIMARY QUALITIES** (shape, size, motion, solidity)
    - These *are* intrinsic qualities in bodies.
    - Our ideas of these qualities *do* resemble the qualities themselves.
  
  - **SECONDARY QUALITIES** (colors, odors, tastes, felt textures...)
    - These are in material bodies ***only as causal powers*** to produce certain sorts of sensations in us.
    - These causal powers ***result from the PQs***. It is simply that such-and-such a microstructure configuration of PQs interacts with our senses to produce such-and-such a sensation in us.
      - So the SQs are really nothing in the object over and above the PQs.
    - Our *ideas* of these qualities ***in no way resemble*** the qualities themselves. (After all, the qualities themselves are just causal powers to produce sensations in us – and these causal powers just result from the micro-configuration of PQs.)
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# SECONDARY & TERTIARY QUALITIES

- In fact Locke thinks that secondary qualities are, metaphysically speaking, much like his *third* category of quality, the TERTIARY QUALITIES. (See Locke's *Essay* 2.8.23-25)
    - **SECONDARY QUALITIES** are causal powers (resulting from the PQs) to cause certain sorts of sensation in *minds like ours*.
    - **TERTIARY QUALITIES** are causal powers (resulting from the PQs) to cause certain sorts of changes in *other material objects*.
      - For example: A magnet's power to cause motion in iron filings; the Sun's power to melt ice; a hot coal's power to heat, blacken and burn neighboring objects.
  - Note that both SQs and TQs are just different types of **causal powers**, and that both are just **results of the intrinsic, more explanatorily basic PQs**. (This is much more obvious in the case of TQs, but Locke thinks that it holds for SQs as well.)
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# THE BIG QUESTION...

- Can Locke establish that there is in fact this deep metaphysical difference between PQs on the one hand and SQs (& TQs) on the other? How?

*To be continued...*

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